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The
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THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES: A PROGRAMME

“THE care which a nation devotes to the preservation of the monuments of its past may serve as a true measure of the degree of civilization to which it has attained.”¹ The chief monument of the history of a nation is its archives, the preservation of which is recognized in all civilized countries as a natural and proper function of government. No government has expended larger sums of money for the purchase of historical papers (many of which should never have passed from the possession of the state), or made more lavish appropriations for the publication of historical documents (too often selected at random and ill edited), than that of the United States; and no government has more signally failed in the fundamental and far more imperative duty of preserving and rendering accessible to the student the first and foremost of all the sources of the nation's history, the national archives. It is to a review of this failure and of its consequences, and especially to a consideration of the remedies to be adopted, that the present article is devoted.

The archives of the federal government are composed of the letters, orders, reports, accounts, and other documents produced in the course of transacting the public business, whether located within the District of Columbia, or wherever the operations of the government extend. The value of these archives may truly be said to be inestimable. In the transaction of current business those of recent date are in constant use while those of earlier origin are frequently referred to. They constitute the chief protection of the state against unfounded or ill-founded claims. In international discussions or disputes they are the principal source from which arguments may be

¹ *Les Archives Principales de Moscou du Ministère des Affaires Étrangères* (Moscow, 1898), p. 3.

drawn to support the contentions of the government. On them are based the titles to millions of acres of land and to thousands of patent rights. The actual money loss, to say nothing of the inconvenience, that would result to the government and to citizens as well, by the destruction of any considerable part of the federal archives, can hardly be calculated.²

One might suppose it unnecessary in this connection to dwell at length upon the historical value of the archives, yet there seem to be reasons for doubting that this is sufficiently appreciated, even by those engaged in historical work. For nearly ten years the writer has been in a position where he is nearly certain to learn of any serious historical research that is being conducted in Washington archives, yet for that entire period he can recall not more than two score of such investigations.³ When one reflects upon the hundreds who frequent the Public Record Office or the Archives Nationales in the course of a single year one is strongly tempted to conclude that those who should be the best friends of the archives have but slight appreciation of their worth. Naturally certain classes of material have less interest than others. Files of money-order receipts do not have the same attraction for the historian as do the volumes of diplomatic correspondence, and the archives of the Department of the Navy are more frequented than those of the Land Office. But it would be a great mistake to suppose that the records of the Department of State and of the Navy and War departments contain all of the historical material in the federal archives. It may be worth while at this point to pass in review certain groups of records in the different departments and bureaus that are deserving of greater attention from investigators than they have received.

In the Department of State the diplomatic archives although well known have in reality been but little used. Here is a group of more than three thousand volumes, comprising the despatches from diplomatic agents abroad, the instructions sent to them, and the correspondence with the agents of foreign powers resident in the United

² "The destruction by fire of any one of the executive departments would cause almost irreparable injury, confusion, and delay in the transaction of its business, and this is especially true of the Treasury. This department is the great clearing house of the Government. Here all its debts are paid, and here are preserved the evidences of such payment . . . in the event of their destruction numberless claims against the government would at once arise to embarrass it." (*Annual Report of the Secretary of the Treasury*, 1899, p. xlvii.) An almost unlimited number of similar citations could be made, all emphasizing the purely material value to the government of its archives. See for example *History of the Movement for a National Archives Building* (*Sen. Doc. 297*, 62 Cong., 2 sess.).

³ Exclusive of work done in the Library of Congress where collections are not, for the most part, archival, and exclusive also of the *service commandé* of the Carnegie Institution.

States. The idea seems to have obtained that a large part of this material has been published, but in the part most fully exploited—that prior to 1828 as published in the *American State Papers*—hardly a fourth of the documents has been published.⁴ Another group of material, almost unknown and even less used, is the series of some four thousand volumes known as the Consular Archives, which contain the correspondence of the department with our consular officers abroad and with foreign officers within the United States. Many of the consular despatches are the work of keen observers and contain detailed and valuable accounts of conditions and events in the vicinity of their respective posts, especially of such matters as affect American interests. The character of this material is well illustrated by the group of documents recently printed in this journal respecting Toussaint Louverture and the relations between the United States and Santo Domingo.⁵ Another group of quite unused material in the Department of State is composed of the two series Domestic Letters and Miscellaneous Letters which together fill about 1,500 volumes. Here is to be found correspondence between the Secretary of State and other officials, both national and state, relating to an infinite variety of subjects, such for example as the suppression of the slave-trade and opium traffic, police service in Asiatic waters, return of fugitive slaves, Mexican troubles, international boundaries, etc. In the Department of State are also papers relating to the administration of the territories,⁶ applications for office,⁷ and the archives of the Russian-American Company, some seventy-five volumes, in Russian, covering the years 1817 to 1867, and transferred to Washington upon the cession of Alaska. That the various groups which have just been mentioned have been so little used is the more surprising when one considers that they are all in a department where students have long been accustomed to work and where better accommodations are provided than in most of the other departments.

Turning now to the Department of War, we find a very different state of affairs. It is here that the greatest concentration of the

⁴ A. C. McLaughlin, *Report on Diplomatic Archives* (Washington, Carnegie Institution, 1904), p. 4. For a fuller account of the archives of the various departments and offices see Van Tyne and Leland, *Guide to the Archives of the Government of the United States in Washington* (second ed., Carnegie Institution, 1907), or W. G. Leland, "The Archives of the Federal Government", in *Columbia Hist. Soc., Records*, XI. 71-100 (Washington, 1908).

⁵ AMERICAN HISTORICAL REVIEW, XVI. 64-101.

⁶ See David M. Parker, *Calendar of Papers in Washington Archives relating to the Territories of the United States* (Carnegie Institution, 1911).

⁷ See Gaillard Hunt, *Calendar of Applications and Recommendations for Office during the Presidency of George Washington* (Washington, 1901).

records has been effected and most of the archives are in the office of the adjutant-general. For years, however, no one not connected with the department has been permitted to have access to the records, and it is not surprising therefore that little use has been made of them—except such as have been printed—for historical purposes. It has never been possible even to know with exactness what the war archives comprise. Revolutionary records there are, but in no very great quantity; the correspondence of the Secretary of War is complete since 1800; the records of the regular army and of the volunteer armies are complete since about 1805; and there are also the captured archives of the Confederate government, the records of the Freedmen's Bureau, as well as much else which until within a few months has been wholly inaccessible to students. In other offices of the Department of War, however, a more liberal policy has obtained and the student might have—but seldom has—made good use of considerable material. Thus the office of the inspector-general contains several volumes of early inspection reports, which present an admirable picture of the condition of the army between 1812 and 1836. In the office of the judge-advocate-general are the proceedings of all general courts-martial, and courts of inquiry, while the office of the chief of engineers possesses over 50,000 maps and charts, and the Bureau of Insular Affairs has the records of the Philippine insurrection and of the occupation of Cuba.

In the Navy Department, where students have long received generous treatment, there is material which of late years is becoming better known. Especially is this true of the correspondence between naval officers and the department, which begins in 1802 and fills about three thousand volumes arranged in various series. The greatest variety of subjects is touched on in these letters: Mediterranean affairs, difficulties with the Barbary powers, protection of American commerce, the slave-trade, Central and South American affairs, protection of American missionaries in Syria and Egypt in 1850, the reception of the Hungarian refugees in 1851, scientific and exploring expeditions, negotiations with Japan, and countless other matters are treated in these volumes. Other groups consist of the log-books of the naval vessels, the records of the navy-commissioners, 1815–1842, proceedings of courts-martial and boards of inquiry, and the records of the Marine Corps.

In the Treasury Department the correspondence of the secretary's office—several thousand volumes—constitutes a rich and unexplored field. Such matters are touched on as the removal of the public money to banks, issues of treasury notes, tonnage duties on Mexican vessels, the French indemnity, public lands, the embargo, act, nulli-

fication, the United States banks, etc. It is needless to say that the student of public finance, of customs administration, and of similar subjects can hardly hope to make a thorough study of his topic without prolonged use of this material. Other series there are relating to the French spoliation claims, Southern claims, captured and abandoned property, and issues of notes and bonds, and mention should not fail to be made of the five hundred volumes of loan-office records, 1784-1855, nor of the enormous masses of records in the offices of the auditors.

The correspondence of the Postmaster-General is nearly complete from 1789 and reflects with remarkable fidelity conditions throughout the country at various periods. Especially is it valuable in the study of the westward movement, for the post-office must keep pace with population.

In the Department of Justice the correspondence of the Attorney-General has been preserved since 1817. It deals with a great variety of matters, such for example as proposed legislation of all sorts, land grants to the railroads, frauds in the collection of the revenues, suppression of the Ku Klux movement, protection of voters in federal elections, the Fenian uprising, the Cuban insurrection, filibustering expeditions against Mexico, appointments of federal attorneys, marshals, judges, and clerks, land titles in acquired territory, the execution of the fugitive slave law, and countless other subjects.

In the Department of the Interior are to be found some of the most valuable series, from the student's point of view, in the federal archives. In the office of the secretary, in addition to the general correspondence, are special groups, such as the territorial papers. In the Indian Office are thousands of boxes of letters, reports, accounts, and other papers relating to every phase of the conduct of Indian affairs and history.⁸ The records of the General Land Office are among the most valuable of the federal archives and the history of the states that have been carved out of the public domain cannot be fully known until students have made ample use of this source.

The Department of Commerce and Labor is of recent creation but it is in part composed of offices that have long been in existence. Thus its archives include the records of the Coast and Geodetic Survey, rich in maps and correspondence, the records of the Bureau of Navigation with its series of "marine documents" which constitute a record of American vessels since 1815, and the original census schedules—beginning in 1790—of the Bureau of the Census.⁹

⁸ About the only work yet produced that is based on this material is Miss Annie H. Abel's thesis on *The History of Events resulting in Indian Consolidation West of the Mississippi* (Am. Hist. Assoc., *Annual Report*, 1908).

⁹ The schedules of 1790 have been published by the bureau.

The Department of Agriculture, the Civil Service Commission, and the Interstate Commerce Commission all possess records which the student may not overlook, and the records of the courts, somewhat better known because so constantly consulted by lawyers, would well repay a closer acquaintance on the part of the historian.

The archives of the House of Representatives and of the Senate abound in valuable material. Petitions and accompanying papers, drafts of bills, reports of committees, and proceedings of hearings are among the more interesting classes of papers, and in spite of the six thousand or more volumes of *Congressional Documents* that have thus far been printed, the student of almost any phase of our national history may search with profit among the manuscript archives of Congress.

Having thus considered the material and historical value of the federal archives we naturally inquire what measures the government has taken to ensure their safe-keeping and to render them accessible, not only for administrative use but for historical purposes. It takes but a small amount of space to set forth the general legislation on this subject.

The head of each department is authorized to prescribe regulations for the custody, use, and preservation of the records and papers of his department.¹⁰ Provision is made for the punishment of any one who alters, forges, or counterfeits any public record for the purpose of defrauding the government,¹¹ of any person who wilfully and knowingly steals or destroys any record or paper filed in a public office,¹² or of any public official who withdraws or destroys any paper or record in his custody.¹³ Copies of books, records, papers, or documents in any of the executive departments authenticated by the seal of the department are to be admitted as evidence equally with the original.¹⁴ Accumulations of "files of papers" not needed in the transaction of current business and possessed of no permanent value or historical interest, are to be reported to Congress by the head of the department in which they exist, and are to be examined by a joint committee of the two houses. If the committee finds the papers to be indeed "useless" it shall report to Congress and the head of the department shall thereupon sell them as waste paper or otherwise dispose of them.¹⁵ Finally it is provided:

¹⁰ *Rev. Stat.*, § 161.

¹¹ Act of April 5, 1866. *Statutes at Large*, XIV. 12; *Rev. Stat.*, §§ 5418, 5479.

¹² Act of February 26, 1853. *Statutes at Large*, X. 170; *Rev. Stat.*, § 5403.

¹³ Act of February 26, 1853. *Statutes at Large*, X. 170; *Rev. Stat.*, § 5408.

¹⁴ *Rev. Stat.*, § 882.

¹⁵ Act of February 16, 1889. *Statutes at Large*, XXV. 672. Act of March 2, 1895. *Id.*, XXVIII. 933.

That facilities for study and research in the Government Departments, the Library of Congress, the National Museum, the Zoological Park, the Bureau of Ethnology, the Fish Commission, the Botanical Gardens, and similar institutions hereafter established shall be afforded to scientific investigators and to duly qualified individuals, students, and graduates of institutions of learning in the several States and Territories, as well as in the District of Columbia, under such rules and restrictions as the heads of the Departments and Bureaus mentioned may prescribe.¹⁶

These provisions of law seem very satisfactory and might conceivably provide a sufficient framework for a system of archive administration. But it is hard to make bricks without straw, and archives, which accumulate with astonishing rapidity, can not be properly preserved and made accessible without a place in which to keep them, and as yet that place has not been provided. This failure is not due to the fact that the matter has not been called to the attention of Congress. For over thirty years Presidents and heads of departments, as well as historical scholars, have repeatedly urged upon the legislative branch the necessity of making better provision for the records, but thus far without result. The inevitable effect of this apathy on the part of Congress has been to bring about the well-nigh intolerable situation which to-day confronts official and student alike.

This situation has frequently been described and nowhere more accurately nor in more vigorous terms than in official reports,¹⁷ but we cannot pass over it lightly in the present connection. The great growth of the business of the government, the expansion of the departments, the creation of new bureaus, the assumption of new functions, have all combined to render quarters that were none too ample a quarter of a century ago almost uninhabitable to-day. To this state of congestion with all its attendant inconvenience the accumulation of the records has contributed its full share. The effect upon the archives of this overcrowding has been most disastrous. Those no longer needed in the transaction of current business have, naturally enough, been considered an incumbrance, and, if they could not be destroyed as "useless papers", they have been stored wherever space could be found for them. Thus they are in cellars, and subcellars, and under terraces, in attics and over porticos, in corridors and closed-up doorways, piled in heaps upon the floor, or crowded into alcoves: this, if they are not farmed out and stored in such rented structures as abandoned car-barns, storage warehouses, deserted theatres, or ancient but more humble edifices that should long

¹⁶ Act of March 3, 1901. *Id.*, XXXI. 1039.

¹⁷ See especially *House Report 1767*, 56 Cong., 1 sess.

ago have served their last useful purpose.¹⁸ Nor do the records in current use fare much better. They are, whenever that is possible, a little nearer the clerks who must consult them, but the line of demarcation between the current and uncurrent records is not a sharp one and the former are gradually absorbed into the mass of the latter.

Such a state of affairs cannot exist without subjecting the archives to real and grave dangers. The danger from fire is an ever present one and is clearly set forth in a document of recent origin emanating from the House Committee on Buildings and Grounds.¹⁹ A sub-committee on fire protection after personal investigation and many hearings "found that as a rule the precautions against fire in public buildings were lamentably deficient. In some of the buildings the danger of untold destruction both of life and property is immediate and appalling. Priceless records are in momentary danger of annihilation by fire, being kept for the most part on wooden shelves and cases in non fire-proof structures. The loss of Geological Survey records, Land Office records, historical papers dating from the beginning of the government, records of the Patent Office, Civil Service Commission, and other offices could hardly be measured in terms of millions, and yet, unless wiser measures are followed than at present obtain, we may witness at any moment a loss of Government property beside which the recent Albany State capitol fire would be insignificant."²⁰

The apprehensions of the committee are only too well grounded. The archives most exposed to danger are probably those in certain of the rented buildings which are little better than fire-traps, but even in such structures as the Treasury building and the State, War, and Navy building the danger is by no means slight. While these buildings are supposedly fire-proof or nearly so, they are full of inflammable material, and the attics, which are generally packed with records, would spring into blaze, especially during the hot weather, upon slight provocation.

Nor is the past experience of the government with respect to fires reassuring. In November, 1800, the building occupied by the War Department together with all the records was destroyed.²¹ Two

¹⁸ The principal rented buildings or parts of buildings used mainly for storage are: old car-barns at 1st and B streets, S. W.; Cox Building, 1707-1709 New York Avenue, N. W.; storage buildings, 920 E Street, N. W.; storage buildings, 418 10th Street, N. W.; 1334 F Street, N. W.; 1338 G Street, N. W.; Union Building. Many other buildings might be mentioned which are used for both offices and storage but mainly for the former. *House Doc.* 785, 61 Cong., 2 sess.

¹⁹ *Hearings and Reports of the Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds of the House of Representatives.* 62 Cong., 1 sess. (Washington, 1911).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, preface, p. iv.

²¹ *Am. State Papers, Misc.*, I. 232.

months later a fire in the Treasury Department destroyed a considerable part of the records in the auditor's office.²² The losses in 1814, when Washington was occupied by the British, were not great either in extent or importance, except in the House of Representatives,²³ and in any case need not be considered in this connection as they were due not to negligence but to military incapacity. One of the most serious fires was that of March 31, 1833, which destroyed practically all the correspondence of the Secretary of the Treasury.²⁴ Three years later, the Post-Office records relating to the establishment of post-offices and the appointment of postmasters as well as the journal and orders of the Postmaster-General were burned, together with nearly all the records and models in the Patent Office.²⁵ The Patent Office was again visited by fire in 1877 and lost 87,000 models and 40,000 sets of photographic copies of drawings, but no records or files.²⁶ In 1880 a fire started in the War Department but caused no loss of archives, an experience which was repeated a few months later.²⁷ There have been no serious fires of late years, although several small ones have occurred in the Geological Survey²⁸ and the Pension Bureau,²⁹ but this immunity must be attributed solely to good luck and is quite undeserved.

Fire, however, is not the only enemy of archives. Quite or nearly as effective although slower in action are damp and dust, extremes of temperature, lack of ventilation, rough handling, and vandalism. From all of these the archives have sorely suffered. Until recently the archives of the Senate were stored beneath the west terrace of the Capitol, and the writer recalls having found hundreds of volumes covered with mould and literally soaked through. The records of the office of the Treasury auditor are in the sub-basement of the Treasury building, where they absorb moisture during the summer and dry up during the winter while the heating apparatus is in operation.³⁰ Other Treasury records are stored under the grass plot at the north entrance, in close neighborhood to the large fountain erected there. The basement of the building, occupied originally by the

²² *Ibid.*, pp. 241-242.

²³ *Id.*, II, 245, 248-252. It is nevertheless the fashion in the departments when papers antedating September, 1814, cannot be found to attribute their loss to the depredations of the invader.

²⁴ *House Ex. Doc. 22, 23 Cong., 2 sess.*

²⁵ Fire of December 15, 1836. *House Report 134, 24 Cong., 2 sess.*

²⁶ Fire of September 24. *House Ex. Doc. 2, 45 Cong., 1 sess.*

²⁷ *History of the Movement for a National Archives Building*, p. 4.

²⁸ *Hearings and Reports of the Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds*, no. 4.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 10.

³⁰ See testimony of chief clerk of Treasury Department in *Hearing before the Committee on Public Buildings and Grounds*, U. S. Senate, March 1, 1912.

Corcoran Art Gallery but in recent years by the Court of Claims, is also employed as an archive depot, but after a heavy rain those who consult the archives must navigate through several inches of water.³¹

In all the principal departmental buildings in Washington records in enormous quantities are stored under the roofs where they quickly dry up under the influence of the summer heat and before long become so brittle that they fall to pieces when examined. Other records are in close proximity to steam pipes or heating flues, and suffer a similar fate. It is the exception to find even an effort made to protect papers from dust, while the War and Treasury records that fill several floors of a storage warehouse³² are gradually deteriorating from the effects of eternal darkness and lack of ventilation.

In consideration of the conditions that have been described it will occasion no surprise to be told that the federal archives have suffered from vandalism. It avails but little to make the theft or mutilation of records a felony when they are freely exposed to the ravages of the first comer. In many offices the older records bear evidence of having suffered under the autograph hunter. The archives of the House of Representatives have been especially ill used and it is the tradition of the file room that the open fire of the "file clerk" was once kept going for an entire winter with bundles of petitions and other papers. Not many years ago a laborer employed by the Treasury Department raided its archives in search of internal-revenue stamps and, to remove the evidences of his operations, destroyed a large quantity of vouchers.³³ More recently still a negro was found endeavoring to dispose of two sacks of Indian Office records as waste paper.³⁴ While the writer has heard many stories of depredations of the sort described and has seen clear evidence of many others it is highly probable that far more are committed than are ever discovered or perhaps even suspected.

Another source of danger is in the frequent transfer of large masses of records from one place to another. Undoubtedly there have been serious losses in the archives of the Indian Office in this way, while the archives of the various auditors seldom know what it is to remain long in one place. Not only does this frequent handling occasion the actual loss of documents, but it subjects the archives to a great deal of unnecessary wear and they suffer accordingly.

Such conditions not only expose the government to the great

³¹ See testimony of Miss Rosa Chiles. *Hearing*, etc., March 1, 1912.

³² 920 E Street, N. W.

³³ *Sen. Doc.* 236, 57 Cong., 1 sess.

³⁴ Information furnished Miss Chiles.

financial loss that might be occasioned by the destruction of certain bodies of records but they actually do occasion the government, every working day of the year, a heavy loss through the impairment of efficiency and the obstruction of business. The archives of the office of the Secretary of the Treasury are stored in several widely separated places and under conditions that make their proper arrangement a physical impossibility. Yet these archives, even the most ancient ones, are frequently needed in the transaction of current business. It then becomes the duty of the file clerk to institute a search for the desired papers, a search which in many cases is carried on for days before they are found or finally given up as hopelessly lost. In small offices where no one clerk is especially charged with the care of the records the time lost in searching for papers amounts in the course of a year to a very considerable item.

But the government is not the only sufferer from this state of affairs. It is quite time to consider the sad plight of the student who desires to pursue historical, economic, or scientific studies in the federal archives. The right of the student to use these archives for proper purposes, governmental interests being fully safeguarded, does not, one may assume, need to be supported by exhaustive argument in the pages of a journal devoted to the advancement of historical studies. Should it be questioned by the layman, the official, or the lawmaker, it may be replied that it is a right generally conceded in the civilized countries of the world and expressly confirmed in the United States by the law of March 3, 1901, already cited,³⁵ which directs that facilities for study and research in government departments and elsewhere shall be provided to proper persons, under such regulations as may be prescribed by the heads of departments. The question of right being thus disposed of let us see what are the conditions under which the student must exercise the privileges accorded him. First he must locate the material he wishes to see, and this is not always an easy task. Each office—frequently each division of an office—maintains its own records.³⁶ Offices have been abolished and new ones created, they have been transferred from one department to another, their functions have been modified or redistributed, and while in theory and law the records have followed the office or the function, they have in practice frequently failed to do so, and in

³⁵ See above, p. 7.

³⁶ The War Department has a general depot in the office of the adjutant-general, but the records of several offices are not included in it. The Navy archives most likely to be used by the historical student are in a single office, while the most interesting records of the Department of State are in two bureaus. Elsewhere there is little concentration of records and there are in Washington considerably over a hundred archive depots, large and small.

some instances have been lost sight of for years, or even appear to have dropped out of existence altogether.³⁷ Assuming however that the investigator is able to determine the probable location of his material, he must then seek authorization to use it from the head of the department in whose archives it is to be found. The granting of this permission will depend largely upon the nature of the material. Although there is no chronological dead-line the student will find that access to records antedating the Civil War is readily enough granted, but less readily to those of later date, but there is no uniformity of practice in this respect.³⁸ Armed then with the needed

³⁷ Not long ago some 760 file boxes of Indian Office archives came to light in the attic of the Interior building where they appear to have lain since 1876. For years there was an informal dispute between the State and Interior departments respecting the transfer of the territorial papers when the administration of territorial affairs was transferred from the former to the latter department in 1873. The State Department asserted that the papers had been transferred, the Interior Department asserted that they had never been received. As a matter of fact they appear not to have left the State Department. It is the tradition in the office of the chief of engineers in the War Department that the records of that office were sent to the Capitol about 1850 and never again heard of. This is quite possible as the records now in the office prior to 1850 are very incomplete and there appears to be no trace of such material in the Capitol.

³⁸ Many classes of records are regarded as confidential, such for example as those of the commissioner of internal revenue, the Secret Service, the Bureau of Corporations, etc. Other classes of records are freely opened to inspection to very recent dates. Much depends upon departmental or office tradition. The peculiar case of the War Department however calls for special attention. As already stated, most of the military records were some years ago brought together in the office of the adjutant-general in the custody of an officer who refused to allow any one not connected with the department to have access to them. The principal official use made of these records was the answering of inquiries from the Pension Bureau respecting the military service of applicants for pensions. An elaborate "card-record-index"—in reality a copy, on cards, of muster rolls and other records—was devised by the officer referred to, whereby the transaction of business was notably facilitated. The same officer had likewise brought to a successful termination the *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion* and had in preparation similar compilations respecting the other wars of the United States. He maintained that the delicate condition of the records, the complexity of the "index", lack of room and clerks, as well as his purpose to publish everything of historical value, all made it impossible to allow students to have access to the records. This policy of exclusion was carried so far as to refuse to a state which had loaned certain records to the department the privilege of having them copied at its own expense. Under certain conditions queries respecting the military service of individuals were answered provided the information was desired for the purpose of securing a pension or of joining an hereditary society (see War Department, Orders, February 23, 1897). Soon after the relief of this officer from duty as adjutant-general, the regulations were modified and duly accredited students are now allowed access to the records (see War Department, Orders, March 26, 1912). It may seriously be questioned whether the former adjutant-general was not disregarding the law of March 3, 1901, already cited, as well as the provision in the law of March 2, 1889 (*Statutes at Large*, XXV. 971) which directed that after the publication of the *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*, the original papers should be accessible to the public.

authorization the student seeks out the chief of the bureau where the archives in question are believed to be. Here he is turned over to the file clerk if there is one, if not to the clerk who has acquired the reputation of being most familiar with the records. The actual search now begins. Such indexes or finding lists as may be available have generally been compiled for office purposes only, and while they may serve admirably such uses they are more often a source of confusion than of aid to the uninitiated investigator. The chaotic state of the classification of many of the older records furnishes still another cause of perplexity. Nearly every office has, from time to time, changed the system of classifying and arranging its archives. Series are found which do not seem to connect with any group of earlier or later documents, while other series have been known by different names at different times. If, at last, after a search which has probably been conducted with the aid of a ladder and a portable light, the material sought for is found, it may be used at some improvised table space amid the clatter of typewriters, the coming and going of employees, and the transaction of the public business.³⁹ Should the student's investigation lead him into the archives of other offices the entire process must commence over again. When he has completed his work he cannot, ordinarily, be sure that he has found all the material that would be of service. Other documents, as valuable to him as those he has located, may be boxed up and stored in some inaccessible place. Even parts of the very series he has been examining may have strayed into another office and fail to come to his attention.⁴⁰

These then are the conditions that confront the student who would make use of the federal archives. It is small wonder that he is more inclined to carry on his investigation in London and Paris and the Hague than to encounter the hardships he must endure in Washington. And yet he is not wholly blameless for the conditions. So long as he remains the *avis rarissima* of the archives he must not expect large provision for his accommodation.

The review that we have just made of the situation must convince student and layman alike that conditions have become intolerable. It

³⁹ Conditions of work in the Department of State, especially in the Bureau of Rolls and Library, are much better than those just described, for here at least the student will find an entire table and reasonable quiet. In the office of Naval War Records they are still more satisfactory. Nowhere however does one find the workroom and the attendant that are considered indispensable in European archives.

⁴⁰ *E. g.*, the territorial papers are divided between the Bureau of Rolls and Library and the Bureau of Indexes and Archives in the Department of State, as are also the papers of international claims commissions.

remains to seek the remedy. Two remedies have already been attempted by Congress, but in their very nature they are but make-shifts and strike not at the cause of the trouble but at its symptoms. They are on the one hand the destruction of "useless papers", as provided for in the act of February 16, 1889,⁴¹ and on the other the transfer to the Library of Congress of records having especial value.⁴² The first of these measures affords a certain relief but it is too slight to have any marked effect upon the general situation. Its application moreover is not without danger, as evidenced by the recommendation of some "ten tons" of Confederate archives for destruction.⁴³ The second measure affords a still slighter relief, as the transfers that have been made to the Library of Congress have not rendered available any appreciable amount of space in the departments, and its application is also not without danger. One of the soundest principles of archive economy is that of the *respect des fonds*. To disintegrate a series of archives, selecting from it certain documents for preservation in a special depot, and leaving the remainder of the series to its fate, is one of the most dangerous of operations. Not only does it destroy the unity of the series, but it favors the supposition, almost invariably incorrect, that the selected documents contain all of value, and that the rest of the series is worthless. This objection does not, of course, apply to the transfer of collections which have found their way into the various offices and which may be termed "historical manuscripts" as distinguished from archives. These indeed find their proper place in the Library of Congress.⁴⁴

One other measure that has been resorted to, less as a remedy than as an avowed makeshift, is the storage of the records in rented buildings. This not only, as has already been pointed out, increases many fold the dangers to which the archives are exposed, obstructs the transaction of public business, and makes whole masses of material inaccessible to the investigator, but, from the point of view of the national purse, is extravagant and wasteful. In 1906 the government paid an annual rent of \$37,600 for space, within the District of Columbia, which was used for storage purposes solely, to say nothing of the rental of office space which was used only in part for

⁴¹ See above, p. 6.

⁴² Under authority of the act of February 25, 1903 (*Statutes at Large*, XXXII. 865).

⁴³ See *Sen. Report 1083*, 51 Cong., 1 sess. For references to lists of papers recommended for destruction, to 1907, see Van Tyne and Leland, *op. cit.*, under the various offices. The danger of destroying material of historical value is lessened by a recent executive order directing that lists of "useless papers" be submitted to the Librarian of Congress before transmitting them to Congress.

⁴⁴ For transfers to the Library of Congress see Van Tyne and Leland, pp. 257 ff.: also the annual reports of the Librarian of Congress.

storage.⁴⁵ In 1910 annual rentals aggregating half a million dollars were paid in the District by the government.⁴⁶ It is impossible to state exactly what part of this amount should be charged to the storage of the archives, but \$50,000 would be a low estimate and \$75,000 would probably be more nearly correct. Inasmuch as the government can borrow money at three per cent. this is assuredly a high price to pay for temporary accommodations which are not only unsatisfactory and inconvenient, but which expose the government to danger of heavy loss.

The indictment against the present system would seem now to be complete. What is to be done, then, to give us a system that shall be efficient and economical, satisfying at once the requirements of the government and the legitimate demands of the student? We return to the hypothesis with which we started, that it is as much the function of government to preserve and utilize its archives as it is to levy taxes and make laws. This hypothesis is accepted in all civilized countries and is clearly admitted by our own law and practice. It is largely a question of how the function may be performed well, as in England, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Sweden, Canada, and in certain of our own states.

The two essentials are an archive administration and an archive depot. The former should be a branch of the government service, closely connected with all the other branches, and to a certain extent controlled by them. The latter, however, is the core of the situation; and we may give its consideration precedence.⁴⁷

The first matter to receive attention is the site of the building. This must satisfy the requirements of size, security, and convenience. The first of these is perhaps the most important. Whatever, within probable limits, may be the size of the building as first constructed, additions to it will be inevitably necessary and the

⁴⁵ *House Doc.* 196, 59 Cong., 2 sess.

⁴⁶ *Id.*, 785, 61 Cong., 2 sess.

⁴⁷ For a detailed account of the efforts thus far made to secure an archive building the reader may be referred to a document already cited: *History of the Movement for a National Archives Building in Washington, D. C.*, printed as *Sen. Doc.* 297, 62 Cong., 2 sess. It is sufficient to note here that for thirty-four years officials, students, and certain members of Congress, have at frequent intervals endeavored to secure the necessary legislation. In four Congresses, Fifty-fourth to Fifty-seventh, no less than twenty-five bills to this effect were introduced. In 1903 provision was made for the purchase of a site and the preparation of preliminary plans; the plans were drawn, and the site secured—Square 143, lying between E and F and Eighteenth and Nineteenth streets. The latter however now appears to be destined to another use. In 1911 and 1912 fresh efforts were made by the American Historical Association, and bills calling for the preparation of new plans have been introduced into both House and Senate: *Sen. Bill* 5179, *House Bill* 11850, 62 Cong., 2 sess.

location must be such as to admit of these enlargements. The requirements of security will probably be met by almost any site in the city of Washington that is likely to be selected for a public building. The conditions surrounding and ever threatening the Public Record Office in the crowded Fetter Lane, or the Archives Nationales in the congested quarter of the Marais, are nowhere encountered in Washington. Our building wherever located would not fail to have sufficient space about it to protect it from even a general conflagration. The question of convenience however is a more delicate one. On the one hand we have the departments which will be constantly calling for various records; on the other hand we have the students and other users of the archives who would naturally wish to be near the library and the Supreme Court. The site originally selected⁴⁸ is not ideal from either point of view. It is two miles from the Library of Congress, and while not far from the State, War, and Navy building, is not near enough to the other departments to make it conspicuously eligible on that account. It must be admitted however that contiguity to the other offices of the government is not considered essential in Europe. Fetter Lane is a considerable distance from Whitehall, and the Hôtel Soubise is a full two miles from the Ministry of the Interior, while in Dresden the new archive building is to be erected quite outside of the city. By the use of the telephone and pneumatic tubes records can be called for by and communicated to any office as quickly as though they were located in the same building, and much more quickly than under present conditions.

The size of the building will be determined of course by what it is to contain. No estimate has yet been made of the aggregate space occupied by all the records of the government. In 1906 the Treasury archives, within the District of Columbia, were stated to occupy more than a million cubic feet of space, with an annual accumulation of 25,000 cubic feet.⁴⁹ If one were to hazard a guess one would perhaps be not far wrong in placing at 5,000,000 cubic feet the total space occupied by the federal archives within the District of Columbia, and their present annual accumulation at 60,000 cubic feet. These figures do not include federal archives outside of Washington, which would increase them somewhat. But not all the records would be transferred to the new depot. In 1902 it was estimated that the archives that would at once be placed in the new building would occupy only about 1,300,000 cubic feet of space,⁵⁰ and it was with

⁴⁸ See note 47.

⁴⁹ *House Doc.* 756, 60 Cong., 1 sess.

⁵⁰ *History of Movement for a National Archives Building*, p. 13.

this estimate in mind, allowing for the increase of ten years, that the bill now before the Senate, calling for plans for a building which shall have 1,500,000 cubic feet of space at once available (additions to be made as needed until a total capacity of 4,000,000 cubic feet is reached) was drafted.⁵¹ In the opinion of the writer this amount of space is insufficient. It is hard to believe that present requirements could be met by a building of less capacity than 2,000,000 cubic feet. Officials are almost invariably inclined at the outset to overestimate the amount of records that must be retained in their offices for the transaction of current business. Later, when the convenience and accessibility of a central depot have been demonstrated, the tendency is to "unload" vast quantities of material which it was at first supposed indispensable to retain in the offices. This tendency has caused embarrassment to many an archivist who found himself hard put to provide accommodations for unexpected acquisitions, and must be fully reckoned with in planning any archive depot. It is safe to assume then that if officials now believe that they could at once transfer 1,500,000 cubic feet of archives, out of a total of 5,000,000 cubic feet, they would within five years be ready, even anxious, to transfer at least 1,000,000 cubic feet more. At the same time the annual transfer would undoubtedly increase to at least seventy-five per cent. of the total annual accumulation. If our assumption is correct it is clear that the depot must be able at the end of five years to accommodate nearly three million cubic feet and to allow thereafter for an increasing annual accumulation of from 45,000 cubic feet upwards. Thus it would seem to be a short-sighted policy to erect a building with an immediate capacity of less than 3,000,000 cubic feet, and it should be so constructed as to be capable of being added to from time to time without marring its appearance. Furthermore these enlargements should be made before they are actually needed, for congestion within the depot would defeat one of the principal objects of its erection. By way of comparison it may be said that the total capacity of the Library of Congress is 10,000,000 cubic feet, of which about twenty per cent. is devoted to the storage of books. But the Library of Congress has many features that would not be included in an archive depot, fully eighty per cent. of which would be available for the records.

With regard to architecture and construction, while the purpose to which the building is destined must constantly be kept in mind, we may nevertheless hope for something more than a storage warehouse. Externally the building will doubtless be in harmony with

⁵¹ Sen. Bill 5179. Feb. 8, 1912.

the public buildings, undeniably successful, that have been erected in Washington within the last ten years. For the inner structure of the building however we should not fail to seek suggestions from European models, notably those already erected or for which plans have been drawn at the Hague, Rotterdam, Brussels, Antwerp, Magdeburg, Breslau, Berlin, Dresden, or Vienna. While American supremacy in library construction is unquestioned it is due mainly to extensive experience, whereas in the construction of archive depots, which in spite of superficial resemblances differ radically from libraries, we have as yet had no experience at all. This point cannot be too strongly urged and it is to be hoped that provision may be made for a thorough inspection of European depots before preparing the final plans of the new building.⁵² In the meantime however certain requirements, with regard to which there would be general agreement, may be briefly indicated. First of all the building should undoubtedly be of the type in which storage is provided for by a stack, rather than of the type made up entirely of rooms of varying size.⁵³ The stack, familiar from its extensive use in the larger libraries, may be described as a building or portion of a building, in which a steel framework, carrying shelves, extends from the foundation up to the roof and is divided into stories about seven feet in height by platforms laid between the upright supports. The stack, or stacks (for there may be several), should be separated from the rest of the building by fire walls with steel doors, and the windows should be provided with steel shutters. So well protected should the stack be that its contents would be undamaged even though the rest of the building were entirely destroyed. Within the stack there should be elevators, a vacuum cleaning system, and ample electric light. Although European archivists regard this last with great fear, and in many cases do not allow any artificial light within the stack, the dangers attendant upon its use may be reduced to a negligible minimum by carefully enclosing all wires and by the installation of outside switches which would allow the current to be entirely shut off from the stack. Furthermore dependence upon natural light alone is attended with great inconvenience, and considerable waste of space. The ventila-

⁵² A suggestive article by a leading European archivist is "La Construction des Dépôts d'Archives" by J. Cuvelier, in *Bibliographie Moderne*, 1909, nos. 2-4. A detailed description of a modern depot may be found in *Mitteilungen der K. Preussischen Archivverwaltung*, Heft 12 (1909): "Das neue Dienstgebäude des Staatsarchivs zu Breslau", by Dr. R. Martiny.

⁵³ The "stack-construction" is to be found in most of the newer archive depots in Europe. The "small-room" type is best exemplified by the Public Record Office. It should be remembered that most of the older European depots are ancient buildings adapted with varying success to their present use. Such for example is the Hôtel Soubise in Paris, which houses the Archives Nationales.

tion and heating of the stack must be such as to insure an abundance of air and an even temperature, avoiding dampness on the one hand and too dry an atmosphere on the other. These considerations are most important for the preservation of the archives and can not be neglected without disastrous results.

Outside the stack, in the rest of the building, provision must be made for the offices of the administration and the work rooms of employees where the archives will be received, cleaned, and repaired, arranged, bound or placed in folders and boxes, and inventoried. There should also be accommodation for photographic apparatus, and space for permanent and temporary exhibits. Finally, but by no means least, there should be accommodation for those who wish to use the archives. These would preferably take the form of two rooms, a smaller one for officials (although it is probable that most official consultation of the archives will be in the departments, to which the records will be sent when called for), and a large one for the public. This latter should be well lighted and ventilated and capable of affording generous desk space for about a hundred workers. Here of course will be found such catalogues as the public is allowed to use, as well as a library composed of guides and other aids, publications based upon the archives, and such works of reference and bibliography as are likely to be serviceable to those who come here to work. No attempt should be made to build up an extensive library but only to provide such books as are needed constantly at hand; these would consist in considerable part of governmental publications. In addition to the main reference room there might also be provided two or three small rooms where typewriters could be used by students without causing disturbance to other workers.

Such then would be the building; it remains to consider the administration of the archives and the various problems connected therewith. First of all is the question of control. Shall the records that may be transferred to the depot be placed there merely on deposit, physically in the custody of the archivist but legally in the custody and under the control of the same officials as at present? Or shall they be transferred absolutely to the archives building, their legal custody passing with them, the interests of the offices from which they come being of course fully safeguarded by statute or by regulation? Undoubtedly the latter course is preferable; it has come to be adopted in England after long experience had shown the former procedure to be unsatisfactory, and it is practically the course followed in France. It should be understood that no department or office is compelled to give up records which it believes it should retain; but the records once transferred it is much simpler and more

convenient that their legal custody should pass with them. In this way the archivist is enabled to authenticate all documents deposited with him, and responsibility is centred in a single administration rather than divided among the departments and offices.

In what body then shall the control be vested? Preferably in a board or commission rather than in a single person.⁵⁴ The board should be composed of representatives of each of the executive departments, as well as of the judicial and legislative branches, to which should be joined persons of eminence in the historical and legal professions. This board of record commissioners, as it might be called, in addition to having the legal custody of the records deposited within the depot, and making regulations concerning them, should be empowered to investigate the condition of the records of any office, in Washington or elsewhere, under the control of the federal government and to make recommendations respecting their preparation, preservation, and use.

At the head of the archive depot, and acting under the board of record commissioners, would be the archivist or keeper of the records. Under him would be the entire personnel of the depot from the principal assistants down to those employed in the menial positions. At first the personnel would probably be composed largely of clerks transferred from other offices—especially, of course, the file clerks and others most familiar with the records. New appointments however should be based upon the results of competitive examinations. The requirements and emoluments of positions in the archive service should be such as to attract persons of special education and training and the service should offer a career comparable, if not superior, to that offered by library work. We can hardly hope for a national *École des Chartes* and indeed the American archivist has but small need for that knowledge of palaeography, diplomatics, and chronology, which is indispensable in Europe. But he must have a thorough knowledge of American history, of the history of federal administration, and of administrative law, and should be able to read French and German with a certain degree of facility. Some of the

⁵⁴ Senate Bill 6728, 59 Cong., 2 sess., introduced by Mr. Lodge on December 5, 1906, was designed to create a "board of record commissioners" composed of certain executive, judicial, and legislative officers, which was to have the "sole legal custody" of all records of the government, wherever located, "in which the latest date of record is upward of 80 years", as well as of such records of more recent date as might be designated by their present custodians. The provision seems to the writer to be defective in failing to include representatives of all the executive departments or of the legal and historical professions in the board, and in imposing a chronological limitation. A chronological limit is at best an artificial one and it is quite likely that certain offices might very properly desire to retain the custody of records more than eighty years old.

most eminent of European scholars are found in the archive services of their respective countries, and it would be well for us if at the outset we could divest ourselves of the idea that a person who must be "provided for" is thereby qualified for a position in the archives.

The question what material shall be placed in the archive depot is one that will require careful consideration. First of all however it would be well clearly to establish the distinction between the public archives on the one hand, and private archives and historical manuscripts of non-archival character on the other. The place for the latter is so evidently in the Division of Manuscripts of the Library of Congress that it would appear unnecessary to emphasize the principle were it not for the tendency in America to confuse the two classes of material, a confusion that has resulted in several state archives in the gathering together of public and private archives and historical manuscripts without much distinction between the various groups. The collection of private archives and of historical manuscripts by a public archivist is justifiable and even commendable when that is the only means of assuring their preservation, but this is not the case in Washington and the national archive depot should be reserved for the public archives alone.

Which of these then shall be transferred to the national archives and which retained in the offices? It should be made clear that no department or office is to be compelled to transfer any part of its records, but, if the experience of other countries and of some of our own states may be relied upon, all will sooner or later find it to their advantage to do so. In every case the determining factor will be, first, the extent to which the records are used in the transaction of current business, and second, the character of the records themselves. Many offices seldom if ever have occasion to refer to records that date back more than five or ten years and such offices would probably transfer all but the most recent of their files. Other offices, while relying most upon their recent records, still have occasion frequently to refer to the more ancient ones and here it would be necessary to decide whether the use of the latter is sufficient to justify their retention—always bearing in mind, of course, that the new system will enable documents to be produced more quickly than at present and that the retention of records makes necessary more space and a larger clerical force than would be required if the records were transferred. Finally there are offices, notably in the State Department, which make such constant use of certain classes of records that their transfer might actually hinder rather than facilitate the transaction of business. Such records should of course remain where they are.

The character of the records themselves is also a factor in deter-

mining the disposition to be made of them. This is especially true of such as are considered confidential. While it may be assumed that records of this class will be as jealously guarded in the national archives as by their present custodians it may yet be more expedient, in certain cases, for them to remain where they are.

It is perhaps worth while to illustrate what has just been said. In the Department of State three classes of archives are in almost constant use and are furthermore of such a character that it might readily be conceded that they should not pass out of the custody of the department. These are the treaties, and the diplomatic and consular correspondence. But there are other groups of material of great historical value seldom referred to by the department, and containing little, except of recent date, that even the most zealous official could regard as confidential. These are the series of miscellaneous and domestic letters and papers, the laws, the Indian treaties, the territorial papers, and a great mass of miscellaneous material (some of which indeed is not archival at all and should be transferred to the Library of Congress). The papers of international claims commissions, while loosely regarded as confidential, might also be included among the transferable records.

Among the Treasury archives the "Secretary's files" and the records of the auditor's offices, to within a decade or so, could properly be transferred, while on the other hand the records of the secret service division and of the commissioner of internal revenue would doubtless be considered so confidential as to require their retention. In the Navy Department the records of the navy commissioners, a board long since defunct, would naturally be transferred, as well as all other records relating to the construction of ships no longer in existence. The log-books, except possibly those of most recent date, and the correspondence of naval officers anterior to the last quarter of a century would also find their proper place in the national archives. On the other hand records relating to vessels still in commission and, in general, to the national defense would undoubtedly be retained in the department. It is probable that in many classes of the naval archives the line between transferable and non-transferable records would be drawn at the year 1898. In the War Department it would appear as though most of the records prior to the close of the Civil War, or even to a later date, could be transferred with great profit to the department. This would cause the function of furnishing information to the Pension Bureau to devolve upon the archive establishment, but such a function seems more properly to

belong to record clerks than to officers of the army, and it would undoubtedly be performed at considerably less expense to the nation than at present.

Many offices have inherited or otherwise become the custodians of the records of offices which no longer exist. Thus the commissioner of internal revenue has the archives of the old office of the commissioner of the revenue, the Supreme Court has the records of the continental Court of Appeals in Cases of Capture, the Register of the Treasury has the loan office records, and another office in the Treasury Department has the papers of the Southern Claims Commission. Such material, as at present located, is only an incumbrance and its transfer to the archives would be a matter of course.

The cases that have been cited serve to illustrate the way in which the principles laid down would work out.⁵⁵ In general it would be found that the records retained in the offices would be mostly those of the last quarter-century, while the records of any office that has undergone a change of organization or of function would, for the period prior to the change, be transferred, as would also the records of offices, boards, or commissions that are no longer in existence, together with the records of the performance of any function that has now ceased to be exercised. Further transfers would of course be made as the records accumulate. These should be effected at intervals of from one to five years, and should be made with as much regularity as possible in order that the archivist may be prepared to receive them.

Problems of cleaning, repairing, and filing the archives as they are received from the various offices are too technical to consider in detail in the present connection. One rule may, however, be laid down that should be regarded as invariable, namely that all papers must be filed flat. This involves the labor of flattening most of the unbound papers, for the offices have generally made use of file boxes that have necessitated the folding of documents.⁵⁶ Whether papers shall be bound, placed in boxes, or filed in folders, is a question about which there is still much difference of opinion. Certain classes of

⁵⁵ A few illustrations drawn from English experience may also be given. The Foreign Office has transferred to the Public Record Office its diplomatic correspondence to 1869 as well as the archives of many of the embassies. The Colonial Office has transferred its papers to 1882; the Home Office to 1870; the Treasury retains the records of the last twenty-eight years, and makes regular annual transfers. The War Office records have been transferred to about 1868, those of the Admiralty to varying dates, but the most important to about 1860.

⁵⁶ Flat filing has been employed in certain of the newer offices, such as those of the Forest Service, and in certain other offices the old files have been flattened, but the greater part of the unbound records are still folded.

papers may properly be bound, but the preference of most archivists at the present time seems to be for a system of loose filing in folders or portfolios. This has the advantage of flexibility and is much less expensive than any other system.

At this point may perhaps be considered the destruction of so-called "useless papers", for it would be a sad waste of time and money to classify and file documents that were destined to be destroyed. The proper method of procedure would be for each office to indicate, whenever it transfers any body of records, which of those records have no further value for administrative purposes or will cease to have such value after a certain length of time. These indicated records should then be examined under the direction of the archivist or board of record commissioners for the purpose of determining whether they have any conceivable value for historical or other uses not administrative. When at last their complete lack of utility has been demonstrated, they should be disposed of, either immediately or upon the expiration of the term set by the office from which they came. In disposing of them, however, one precaution should be observed which is overlooked in the law of February 16, 1889: their immediate destruction, assuming that they are sold for manufacturing purposes, should be insisted upon and assured, in order to prevent any improper use of them after they pass from the control of the government.

With the useless papers weeded out and the remainder ready for their final filing, the problem of classification demands attention. It is possible only to lay down the principle that should be adhered to in the classification of all archives—the *respect des fonds*. In accordance with this principle records should be so grouped that they at once make clear the processes by which they have come into existence. Archives are the product and record of the performance of its functions by an organic body, and they should faithfully reflect the workings of that organism. No decimal system of classification, no refined methods of library science, no purely chronological or purely alphabetical arrangement can be successfully applied to the classification of archives. The sad work that Camus and Daunou made of the Archives Nationales in attempting to apply a logical system of classification should be a sufficient warning. The administrative entity must be the starting point and the unit, and the classifier must have a thorough knowledge of the history and functions of the office whose records he is arranging; he must know what relation the office has borne to other offices, and the relation of each function to every other function. It may be said that the original filing of the records should be in accordance with the sort of classi-

fication that we have indicated. This should indeed be so, and an important function of the archive administration should be to ensure for the future such a classification of current records in all the offices. But in the past many mistakes have been made and these should, if possible, be corrected when the archives receive their final classification.

The archives once classified and filed it becomes the duty of the archivist to make them accessible for administrative and literary purposes. Four classes of publications naturally suggest themselves: general guides, inventories or check lists, calendars, and collections of texts. The general guide should be an enumeration of the various groups or series of records, indicating for each series its title, the number of volumes composing it, and its limiting dates.⁵⁷ It does not go into details but supplies a sort of first aid to those who would use the archives. Its compilation should go hand in hand with the arrangement of the records and their final grouping.

The next step is the preparation of inventories of the contents of the different series. Such an inventory indicates the title, dates, number of documents and, very briefly, the character of the contents of each volume, box, or portfolio, in any given series. An inventory of the records of a department would include all the series formed from the archives of that department, grouped under the respective offices from which they emanate.⁵⁸ A series of such inventories covering all the groups of archives in the depot is probably the most satisfactory form in which to provide the student with an account of the available material. Their compactness, the ease with which they may be used, and the rapidity and economy with which they can be compiled, are all in their favor.

Then we may expect that calendars of certain of the more important documents will eventually be published. In this form of catalogue the individual document is the unit and the entry for it, besides stating its title, date, author, approximate length, etc., includes a more or less succinct résumé of its contents. A calendar may include all the documents in a given series or group or it may include

⁵⁷ Such for example as Scargill-Bird, *Guide to the Various Classes of Documents preserved in the Public Record Office* (third ed., London, 1908), or the *État Sommaire par Séries des Documents conservés aux Archives Nationales* (Paris, 1891). The present *Guide to the Archives of the Federal Government* published by the Carnegie Institution is both more and less than such a guide: more in that it includes descriptive notes of various series, less in that it does not include all the series.

⁵⁸ An excellent model of such an inventory is to be found in the *État Sommaire des Archives de la Marine antérieures à la Révolution* (Paris, 1898). More detailed inventories are those published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs: *Inventaire Sommaire des Archives du Département des Affaires Étrangères*.

all documents on the same subject or of the same kind regardless of the series in which they are to be found.⁵⁹ The résumé may be very detailed, so that for historical purposes it practically takes the place of the original, as in the well-known British *Calendars of State Papers*, or it may be much briefer as in the various volumes published by the Library of Congress. The latter form is much more rapidly compiled and is, in general, more practicable.

With regard to the publication of groups of documents it may with some reason be contended that this is not properly a function of the archivist. Rather should it be left to the various historical agencies of the country. A plan is now before Congress for the establishment of a permanent Commission on National Historical Publications which if adopted will provide in the most satisfactory and systematic fashion for the exploitation of the archives.⁶⁰

Finally, the question of the use of the archives both by officials and by students calls for attention. With regard to official use it may be assumed that in the great majority of cases this will take the form of a demand by a certain office for documents needed in the transaction of affairs, the transmission of the documents in question, their consultation in the office calling for them, and finally their return to the archives. The only problem is to provide for the immediate communication of such material, and, equally important, to ensure its prompt return to the archives. It may be however that certain offices, the principal function of which is to search the records, should be transferred bodily to the archives, or else abolished in their present form, and the function performed by a special corps of archive employees. Some such action would be necessary for example in the event of the transfer of the military records from which information is now furnished daily to the Pension Bureau. A third form of official use of the archives for which provision should be made, would occur when some special but extended investigation must be made on behalf of a certain office. This could be carried on, either by the employees of the archives, or by an employee of the office delegated for that purpose.

With regard to the use of the archives by students, lawyers, and others not attached to the service of the government, or by officials engaged in personal investigations, it becomes necessary to formulate regulations. We cannot here enter into a detailed discussion of such

⁵⁹ A calendar of the first sort would, for example, be one of the Captains' Letters from the naval archives; of the second type, a calendar of papers relating to the administration of Indian affairs; of the third, a calendar of petitions to Congress.

⁶⁰ See *Report to the President by the Committee on Department Methods: Documentary Historical Publications of the United States Government* (1909).

regulations but it would be well to indicate in a general way what classes of records may be made available for non-official use. In most countries a chronological dead-line is drawn beyond which the student may not extend his researches. Thus in France the archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are open to February, 1848, while in the Archives Nationales documents over fifty years old may be called for. A limitation of this sort is undoubtedly convenient from the administrative point of view, but it is artificial and needlessly hampers or makes quite impossible many lines of investigation. A more satisfactory procedure would be to establish a chronological line on the earlier side of which any investigation (except possibly in certain specified cases) could be made without the obtaining of special consent, but on the later side of which each case should be treated on its merits, the decision as to whether the documents asked for should or should not be communicated to be made by the board of record commissioners after consultation with the department or office concerned. The principles upon which such decision should be based have been admirably stated by an official of the government as follows:⁶¹

(a) Archives which represent completed incidents which carry no sequence may cease to be confidential as soon as the incidents are closed.

(b) Archives which relate to political events may be open to general inspection when danger of inflaming public opinion by their revelations has passed.

(c) Archives which contain personal information affecting individuals may cease to be confidential after two generations have passed.

(d) Archives which pertain to international relations must remain confidential as long as they relate to pending negotiations, or if they contain information which would disturb or lessen international good feeling.

(e) Archives furnishing information which might be used against the government's interests should remain confidential.

Such, then, in outline is the plan offered for the administration of the national archives. It has been shown that the present conditions have become intolerable, and that the remedial measures thus far tried are but makeshifts, aggravating the many evils rather than affording relief. To continue as at present is to perpetuate inefficiency and extravagance and to incur risks for which no government should wish to be responsible to the nation. It is the plain duty of Congress to provide a better method, a system adequate to the

⁶¹ Paper by Gaillard Hunt, chief of the Division of Manuscripts in the Library of Congress, read at the congress of archivists held in Brussels in 1910 and included in the *Documents Préliminaires* printed by the committee of organization prior to the opening of the congress. Mr. Hunt's paper was offered in discussion of the subject "Comment doivent s'opérer les versements des archives des administrations contemporaines dans les archives anciennes?"

administrative needs of a great government, a building worthy of a great nation, in which both the requirements of public business and those of historical scholarship shall be completely satisfied. The very absence of a system and of a building leaves us *carte blanche* for arrangements marked by ideal excellence. Why should the nation not have the best of all national archive buildings? Is it not incumbent upon all who cherish our history, and who desire that the rightful heritage of future generations shall pass to them unimpaired, to urge vigorously upon Congress the performance of this long-neglected duty, the meeting of this pressing problem by an ideal solution?

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